

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 130

INFO AMCONSUL ASMARA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE ADDIS ABABA 8114

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT

SUBJECT: EOC ELECTS NEW PATRIARCH

REF: ADDIS ABABA A-76 (NOTAL)

1. ABA (FATHER) MELAKU WOLDE-MIKAEL, A 58-YEAR OLD MONK FROM WOLAYITA SODDO, WAS ELECTED PATRIARCH OF THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH ON WEDNESDAY, JULY 7. HE THUS REPLACES ABUNA YOHANNES WHO HAD BEEN SERVING AS INTERIM PATRIARCH SINCE THE DEPOSITION (AND ARREST) OF TEWOFILOS IN FEB. 1976.

2. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, ABA MELAKU RECEIVED 317 OF THE 809 VOTES CAST BY DELEGATES REPRESENTING CHURCH LEADERS AND LAYMEN OF THE VARIOUS DIOCESES AND MONASTERIES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. THE OTHER CANDIDATES INCLUDED: ABUNA ENDRIAS, ARCHBISHOP OF BEGEMDIR, WHO RECEIVED 286 VOTES; ABA TEWOLDE-BERHAN WOLDE-SELASSIE, A RELIGIOUS TEACHER AT DEBRE-BEZEN MONASTERY, 152 VOTES; ABUNA SELAMA, ARCHBISHOP OF GEMU GOFFA, 35 VOTES; AND ABA YOHANNES KEHALI OF THE ETHIOPIAN MONASTERY IN JERUSALEM, 19 VOTES. ONE DELEGATE ABSTAINED DURING THE VOTE AND "59 OTHERS CAME LATE AND DID NOT VOTE." PRESS NOTES

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THAT ELECTION FOR PATRIARCH WAS, FOR THE FIRST TIME, INDEPEN-

DENT, DEMOCRATIC, AND FREE FROM GOVERNMENT MANIPULATION, UNLIKE PREVIOUS PATRIARCHAL ELECTIONS. THE FIVE NOMINEES WERE "SCREENED" BY A CHURCH COMMITTEE OF 13 RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND LAYMEN, INCLUDING AT LEAST SOME DIRG MEMBERS. (SEE REFAIR).

3. EMBASSY HAS NO BIO INFORMATION ON NEW PATRIARCH OTHER THAN WHAT IS GIVEN IN PRESS, AND THIS WILL BE POUCHED TO DEPARTMENT. WE WILL REPORT REACTIONS AS SOON AS THEY BECOME EVIDENT.

4. COMMENT: MEMBER OF COMMITTEE OF 13, WHO IS KNOWN TO US AS RELIABLE SOURCE, TOLD BRIT COLLEAGUE THAT 5 FINAL NOMINEES WERE SELECTED FROM A LIST OF 180 CANDIDATES. BALLOTING WAS CONDUCTED IN SECRET AND PRESS STATEMENT THAT 59 DELEGATES CAME LATE AND DID NOT VOTE IS ACCURATE. THE OUTCOME IS SOMEWHAT OF A SURPRISE, HOWEVER, AS MOST OBSERVERS EXPECTED ABUNA ENDRIAS OR ABA TEWOLDE-BERHAN TO BE ELECTED. PRESS ASSERTION THAT ELECTION WAS DEMOCRATIC AND FREE OF GOVERNMENT MANIPULATION IS PROBABLY ACCURATE AS FAR AS IT GOES. THE SELECTION OF THE 5 FINALISTS IS ANOTHER MATTER, HOWEVER. WE THINK IT LIKELY THAT, IN VIEW OF DIRG'S ACTION DEPOSING FORMER PATRIARCH THEY FELT STRONGLY ENOUGH ABOUT CHURCH'S ROLE IN REVOLUTION TO ENSURE ELECTION OF PATRIARCH WITH WHOM THEY COULD WORK (OR WHOM THEY FELT THEY COULD CONTROL).
TIENKEN

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